

## **John Taylorson OBE**

**5<sup>th</sup> March 1931 – 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

### **EARLY YEARS**

#### **John's Life – from his Memoirs**

John Brown Taylorson was born in March 1931, younger by one hour than his twin David. His father John, ran a successful butcher's shop in Plaistow, in the East End of London. John's older sister, Olive, and brother Tom, had grown up in the flat above the shop, and the family eventually moved to Wanstead where there was a garden for the twin boys. There were trips to Frinton-on-Sea and holidays on the coast and John had happy memories of those days.

At their school, Forest School at Snaresbrook, the twins were known as Taylorson 1 and 2: staff had trouble telling them apart. In their final year in Juniors, they entered all seven events in the sports day, and between them took first or second in all seven! The headmaster realised that the competition between John and David was stifling their development, and placed them in separate houses within the school. Both prospered greatly from the change.

In 1947 John left school to join the Westminster Hotel and Catering College in central London. After doing his National Service in the Royal Air Force, in 1952 he joined Peter Merchant Ltd, owned by Trust Houses. He moved into a flat in central London and had three happy years, and then was given a promotion to Sheffield.

He had been dating an Australian girl, Barbara, and they decided to get married. So in 1958 they loaded their possessions into John's VW Beetle and set off north where they soon settled and enjoyed a good social life.

Business picked up, and in 1962 he was offered another promotion, back to London, as National Sales Manager. He took over a team that was quite demoralised, but in two years had turned it around. When Trust Houses merged with their main rival, the Forte Group, John was promoted to be in charge of the combined Contract Catering divisions.

Barbara became pregnant, and their family started with the arrival of their first daughter, Sally.

John was invited to join the Board, as Director in charge of the North East. Again the family moved north to Sheffield, and grew with the arrival of their son, Jonathan.

After three successful years, John was offered the post of managing a new project developing a contract catering supply and management service in South Africa, from offices based in London. The family moved back south, to Lingfield in Surrey. As Managing Director of what was now Gardner Merchant International, John's work in South Africa proved so successful he was offered the position of MD there.

However, after two years in South Africa, Barbara and the children were unhappy, and returned to England. John remained in South Africa. He says in his memoir that he was too involved in business, and his new hobby of golf, to work on his family.

Finally, in 1979 he returned to England to the family home in Lingfield. He was approached by British Airways, to head up their catering division. John set about creating new menus, finding international chefs, and refining the whole production system. The results were amazing. Once they had improved the food, they did the same for the wines.

But John's long hours and time spent travelling the world brought matters to a head at home and sadly, Barbara decided to return to Australia. John found a new home for himself in Esher, to be closer to Heathrow.

He continued making many BA flights, checking quality of the catering and meeting the crew and talking to passengers. The best flight was one out to Johannesburg and Nairobi, when he met Helen Parkinson, the Purser in charge of the First Class cabin. Over the following months they met whenever their schedules permitted, and in December 1985 they married. In April 1989 they were surprised and delighted when their son, James, was born.

Eventually, John took early retirement from BA. Then Helen met a young mum at post-natal classes, whose son, Oliver, had EB, an incurable

genetic skin condition, and they became involved with DebRA, a charity to help these children. John organised a successful golfing tournament and became a fund-raiser for DebRA. He was to spend the next 20 years helping this charity! Many different fundraising activities ensued. Football, wine tasting, boxing, corporate shoots, dinners, international treks - nothing was ignored.

One fund-raising idea involved setting up a chain of charity shops. The first, in Horsley, was quickly successful, and they opened shops across the country. Opening the shop in Cranleigh introduced Anthea Turner to DebRA, and she became a major fundraiser.

In May 2007 John was honoured to receive the OBE for his services to charity. He resigned from the charity in 2010 at the age of 80!

John remained immensely proud of his children, Jonathan, Sally and James, who have all done well. His grandchildren, Max and Lily, were always a great delight.

### **For my father, by Jonathan**

Thank you all for being here, and thank you Dad for bringing us all together. I would also like to thank his parents, John Brown, and Edith (aka Nana Weed) for bringing Dad and his siblings into the world. Nana Weed was quite a character actually and I recall that, whenever she stayed, we used to laugh as Dad tried unsuccessfully to stop her burning her toast in the toaster; we are not sure if he realised that toast that was burned was her preference!

My earliest recollections of Dad are of us at Purley Squash Club: me sitting on the balcony with a lemonade and lime and a packet of crisps, watching Dad make his opponent run like hell on the court. We used to make lots of trips to this squash club and occasionally I'd even get to play against Dad and get very badly beaten! He was an excellent player and played for Essex County and in the Surrey Cup.

When I was six or seven, Dad cut down one of his wooden rackets and fashioned a handle on it. Then, when he was playing squash, he'd give me 20p for the court lights next door and a yellow dot ball, and I would thrash around waiting for Dad to finish his game. I didn't get a lot of time to play with Dad then, as he took his squash **very** seriously.

As a child, it was not easy finding opportunities to spend quality time with Dad as he travelled abroad so much with his work. When I was about five or six, there was a children's programme show on Sundays called "Thunderbirds" which we loved. Unfortunately for Sally and I, this clashed with "Match of the Day", **Dad's** favourite programme. After lunch on Sundays, he would set himself up in the armchair, reading the Sunday Times, usually falling asleep. I used to creep up to the TV, with Dad snoring away in the chair, and change channels so we could watch Thunderbirds. Suddenly you would hear "I was listening to that!".... and back to "Match of the Day" the TV went.

I have so many fond memories of Dad, some which are sadder. But one thing is certain, I owe him much, and I'm going to miss spending time with the man I tried so hard to get to know.

Our mother, and his first wife, Barbara wanted me to pass on the following to him:

"Thank you for so many good years, and for giving me two wonderful children, rest in peace"

### **A tribute to my father, by Sally**

Thank you all for being here. And thank you Dad for bringing us all together. He always enjoyed a good social gathering and will be very happy to see you all here today.

Being his daughter for fifty-five years, I have many memories of my dad, some good, some bad. Some funny, some sad.

Dad, referred to by many of us in the family as "JB", was a man of many parts. An extraordinary sportsman, an honoured corporate fundraiser, consummate networker, highly successful business man, very competitive twin (AKA "Taylorson 2"), husband, father and grandfather. Oh, and a SHOCKING flirt!

As I mentioned, he achieved great success in all areas of his business life. As a father to Jonathan and I, and husband to our mum, Barbara, he was less successful and there were several years during which he and I saw little of each other.

Happily, thirty years ago, all that changed, when two more handsome Taylorson boys arrived on the scene!

Max and James were born two months apart, enabling them to grow up together as brothers, instead of the nephew and uncle they are.

As their parents, it gave Dad, Helen and I great pleasure to watch the two of them grow up together and develop that incredibly close bond which they still have today. We love them both very much.

And it was this shared experience of parenting that ultimately bought Dad and I back together.

And then.... fifteen years ago, the force of nature that is Lily, arrived in our world! As his only granddaughter she was, and always will be, the apple of his eye. But then he always did have a soft spot for a pretty face!

Dad was, as I mentioned, a great sportsman and he spent decades trying to get me involved, or at least have some appreciation of, two of his great loves - golf and football. Despite his best efforts, I remain to this day, totally uninterested in both! Sorry Dad.

I remember once, maybe 25 years ago, winning tickets to a Chelsea match. The obvious choice of escort to this event was Dad and I can still remember his highly amused disbelief that I should be taking **HIM** to a football game! I also remember the deafening roar of the crowd as they cheered the best goal of the match. Which we missed due to Dad's insistence that we leave early "to avoid the traffic". Taylorson time-keeping at its finest!

Being born in the East End, Chelsea was **not** his team. That place in his heart was filled by West Ham Utd, who he supported with great passion his entire life. I remember him, at his happiest in his armchair, chocolates by his side, watching them play on TV.

As a token of our love for him, could I ask the lovely Lily to join me with her contribution.

## **Tributes from Kurt Hafner & Mike Street**

### **Mike's tribute**

There is no greater honour than to be asked to pay tribute to another. There is equally no more daunting a task than to attempt to capture and do justice, in a few precious minutes, to the achievements, let alone communicate one's respect for one so 'complete' and illustrious as John! Fortunately, everybody here today will have their own treasured memories and all I can hope to achieve is the realisation that we are 'all as one'!

Kurt had already been working with John for some time when I joined the BA Catering team to run the Food Production unit and, to maximise our time here today Kurt and I are going to run this as a bit of a 'double act'.....Kurt, over to you.

### **Kurt's tribute**

What an honour and privilege to be invited to say a few words about John Taylorson who led our team at British Airways.

And I will remember when our previous head of catering retired - But my goodness, who on earth would be able to secure continuity and to lead us to face the enormous challenges ahead – Who would be the genius to create the next chapter for BA?

Well, no worries whatsoever – Because you know, John's reputation as a Creative Visionary with a superb record of leading Transformations in our lively Industry preceded him well before he burst on the scene at British Airways.

And sure enough, after his first couple of weeks, he simply exploded into action, was full of ideas – Inspirational initiatives – And soon started to lead our team in his characteristic stylish way.

First of all he secured sufficient funds to enable us to gradually enhance the menus and dishes that we were able to create – He drove so many initiatives with wonderful enthusiasm and drive – Preparing to create distinctive brands in each cabin – To bring on board the most eminent wine consultants – And many of the global Celebrity Chefs of the day.

And the combination of these initiatives rapidly enhanced BA's reputation of our superior inflight service.

Now John was always great fun, had a wonderful sense of humour – And when the owner of one of the major wine producers in Australia asked he's opinion as we were about to leave – John said 'Yes it's quite good – But you should really add an umbrella stand – It's been raining you know'.

On the flight across the Pacific he wrote an amusing little poem to the cabin crew, to 'The Belle of Pan Am'.

At the Salubrious 21 Club in New York he suggested that the owner should include Haggis and Neeps on the menu – And on Concorde he asked me to include 'The Parkinson Banger' on the 001 ex LHR – 'Gee, what's a Banger some American's asked to which Cabin Crew gave their usual witty responses.

Anyway one day, I thought I had a brilliant idea and saw John in his inner sanctum, suggesting that as our food was improving we should perhaps work with a famous Chef – One Chef, John exclaimed – No, I want you to work with the very best and most famous chefs in the world – And so 'British Airways and The Great Chefs of the world was created with 36 participants in UK – USA – Canada – Asia –Australia – And South Africa.

Do you know I could go on for hours about our superbly creative, kind and inspirational John - But time as always is precious and it is now my enormous pleasure to hand you back to another genius, – Our brilliant Mike Street.

### **Mike's tribute**

John was all that Kurt has said and more! As word of his passing spread, I heard from a number of ex-colleagues and mutual friends. Amongst the memories were a number of, what we got to call, "Classic JTs"; our term for amusing John stories. I could spend the rest of the day, let alone this wonderful service, and still only 'scratch the surface'. John really was the most endearing and amusing character imaginable! He luxuriated in our amusement, well aware of all that was going on and frequently revelled in our use of the term "Classic JT"!

My first ever meeting with him was delayed slightly whilst he made an “urgent phone call”, it was to the BA Chairman! I sat in his office ‘open mouthed’ as he started to speak and soon learnt that his introductory comment to all calls answered by ladies started with the words ..... Oh hello Mary, Jane or whomever, you’re looking so, so wonderful today, gorgeous as ever, simply radiant .... As you might imagine they never tired of it and, of course, he never failed to get exactly what he wanted, no matter how inconvenient the timing of his call. And, of course, it was always great to be alongside Mary or Jane whenever receiving such calls. One can imagine the ‘off line’ chit chat that went on between PAs and Secretaries and, of course, anyone else within ‘ear shot’!

Kurt referred to John’s creativity and vision and there is no doubt, under John’s leadership, the two of them transformed BA’s catering beyond all recognition!

John always knew exactly what he wanted and, in “Classic JT” terms, it was not without note that his personal tastes, often passing fads I joked, featured greatly in the dishes on offer! I always remember his new found ‘passion’ for Fennel, Heaven only knows why but there you are! Fennel featured on just about every menu on offer, such that one season an established local provider was ‘instructed’ to turn his complete production over to its growth, some 40 plus acres of the stuff! I used to ‘rib’ John asking what happens to the poor grower when he tired of Fennel ... “well, he’ll have to dig it up and plant something else won’t he” came the response! Fortunately, the grower knew John far better than I and had been through the process before, he knew exactly what to do!

As always, there are stories that amuse and are soon forgotten and John was the first to laugh at himself; he and I ‘dined out’ for months on the ‘Fennel’ episode.

But just as there was much amusement in our relationship, I have similarly wonderful memories of John’s compassion, his concern for others and his legendary kindness, no matter what the circumstances and there were lots of occasions and, equally, lots of circumstances. Nothing phased John, a man to whom no problem was too great and whose primary concern was always for the welfare of others less fortunate than he, messages dominating the conversations with ex-colleagues and mutual friends, that I referred to earlier.



He would always spare time for those seeking advice and counsel no matter what the subject. One of my best friends emerging from those days, and here today, Roy Moed, an extremely successful entrepreneur and businessman, recounted how he had often sought and listened to John's sound business leadership counsel as he grew and developed. Particularly, when he was set to take on leadership of the Catering Industry's governing Council, a body of some 16 powerful, influential and not necessarily travelling in the same direction company bosses; he sought and received John's invaluable advice and, after one particularly useful session, in true "Classic JT" style added "and when things get really tough let'um think they've carried the day and then with great dignity do exactly as you intended in the first place!"; advice which has come to his rescue countless times and served him extremely well over the years, both within and outside the Industry!

And now for my final and favourite 'Classic JT', one which sadly, or perhaps happily, I was not party to: A day's teambuilding ..... again the main player in this particular tale, Peter Owen, is here with us today.

It was an, out of the office environment, 'away day' trip to a Motor Racing Circuit to discuss strategy and things, well maybe not too much strategy, more of a day out with the boys I guess, where Peter, the boss, had arranged some fun fancy fast car driving for his top team to supplement the serious business stuff! Unbeknown to him BA's Flight Crew Director, Jock Lowe, again here today, had arranged a couple of four seater aircraft from the BA Flying Club; Peter had just secured his Pilot licence and it seemed just the ticket! Off they set and all went to plan until it came time to land when, for some reason, Peter couldn't lower the landing gear on his plane and after a frantic few minutes decided that he would have to land, wheels or not. John was sitting next to him with the other two in the back panicking and praying in equal measure and, as the tension reached 'fever point', John turned around and cool as the proverbial with a huge grin on his face offered his gibbering colleagues a bag of toffees ..... anyone for a sweet asked he?

John was indeed a very special character and is still, I'm sure, 'pulling the strings' as ever he did! As I was preparing to leave to come here today I was listening to the radio and heard a favourite piece of music that I'll always remember from my first meeting with John; it was playing gently in

the background as I entered his office. It brought back floods of wonderful memories resulting in a hurried re-write of the conclusion of this, my tribute to him!

The piece .... Aaron Copland's magnificent Fanfare for the Common Man.

John was, of course, no 'Common' man, on the contrary he was a 'giant' of a man, full of business nous, of panache, friendship, compassion and enormous fun; a man whose retirement farewell took over the whole of our dear friend Michel Roux's renowned 3 Michelin Star Waterside Inn for one its best nights ever; not the sort of thing one does for the 'Common' man! John was a man who knew how to do and did 'style' big time and, along with 100 or so guests, we needed to mark his retirement accordingly!

Henceforth, whenever hearing my favourite piece of music, I will remember John and, as of today, I shall think of Mr Copland's epic no longer as a Fanfare for the Common Man but rather a Fanfare for a Very Special Man!

A Very Special man, that we are all enormously privileged to have known and loved and equally privileged to be here to celebrate his complete and wonderful life; we shall all miss him greatly and, although an often used cliché, the World as a whole really is much the poorer for his passing!

Thank you, dear friend, for touching our lives so completely! May you Rest in Peace.

### **Philip Evans**

My part in John's story begins in 1991, quite soon after John had retired from his successful business career. John and Helen first became aware of DEBRA when they met Mick and Sarah Thomas and their son Oliver who has EB. They were so taken with this young boy that instead of just making a donation to DEBRA John ran a golf day to raise money for the charity, and the two of them persuaded DEBRA to rent an empty shop near their home which they would run as a charity shop. John often said that meeting Oliver changed his life.

By 1994, DEBRA had been going for 16 years and was doing well on most fronts. This was thanks in part to an extraordinary BBC Lifeline Appeal in 1987 which raised over £200K for DEBRA, breaking all Lifeline records and convincing us that EB, although so rare, could attract very significant public support. And in 1990 Princess Diana became our Royal Patron which of course gave DEBRA much greater credibility and public awareness. So, in 1994 we decided to recruit a corporate fundraiser, someone who could mingle amongst the upper echelons of business and the City of London. I found myself sitting next to Helen at a birthday party around that time. Although John had been retired for a number of years I thought he would be ideal for the role and so I asked Helen if she thought John could be interested, perhaps on a part time basis. She encouraged me to talk to him. He joined on a 2 day a week basis which of course morphed into nearly seven days a week within a very short time.

John took to being Director of Corporate Fundraising like a duck to water. His energy, enthusiasm, creativity and force of personality, coupled with sensitivity and modesty, were wholeheartedly committed to making life better for people with EB.

People with the ability to access senior business people, recruit them to the Appeals Council of a charity and then keep them interested and involved with the charity, do not grow on trees. They are very rare, as I was told by other charities who used to say to me wistfully "If only we had a John Taylorson".

John understood that the more influential people he could bring on to the Appeals Council the more events he could run successfully knowing that they were largely underwritten by Appeals Council members who would contribute auction lots, take a table or bring a team, on behalf of the businesses they worked for.

In no particular order, let me give you one or two examples of John's achievements at DEBRA. I have already mentioned the first DEBRA shop run by Helen and John. There are now more than 120 shops producing a hugely important revenue for DEBRA.

The golf days run by John before he even joined DEBRA soon grew to more than 20 each year, all held at prestigious golf clubs. Peter Alliss became President, Steve Rider got involved, and membership of the DEBRA Golf Society grew like topsy with many members also joining the

Appeals Council. The DEBRA Golf Society is an ongoing great success story.

In 1996 Margaret Thatcher was our Guest of Honour at the first DEBRA Annual Dinner which was held in the Dorchester Hotel with 450 guests. John knew that many of the guests were being introduced to EB and DEBRA for the first time and some of them would want to get more involved in the future. Thanks to him the DEBRA Dinner became an annual fixture, held generally at the Dorchester or the Guildhall in the City. I always marvelled at the way he managed to produce a different distinguished politician out of a hat each year to be our Guest of Honour. These included Michael Portillo who of course went on to be an extremely active President of DEBRA for more than 10 years.

In 2003 John introduced himself to Anthea Turner and asked her to open a new DEBRA shop near her home in Surrey. Within 12 months Anthea and Grant Bovey were holding the first of 3 Summer Balls at their home which raised hundreds of thousands of pounds for DEBRA and one other charity.

2005 saw DEBRA's first Fight Night presented by Frank Warren who wanted to get involved with DEBRA after John introduced him to Jonny Kennedy. The DEBRA Fight Nights have been going now for 14 consecutive years and have raised millions of pounds, including a record of more than £500,000 in its 3rd year.

Some members of the Appeals Council were senior directors of companies with thousands of employees. John was able to secure DEBRA as Charity of the Year from most of them which not only raised substantial funds but also spread the word amongst their employees.

Another popular fundraising activity started by John is the DEBRA Shooting Society which holds clay pigeon shooting events each year at a range of prestigious venues and is still a great success.

There were other activities created by John including sponsored charity treks in China and Oman, sponsored London to Paris cycle rides, and gourmet dinners cooked by celebrity chefs which are still a big success.

They used to say "behind every great man is a woman" but I think it would be more appropriate to say "beside every great man is a woman" and of course John was blessed throughout his years at DEBRA with the loyal and unstinting love and support of Helen.

I have been fortunate to meet a number of people in my life who I have admired enormously but no-one has attracted my admiration and respect more than John. His dedication, coupled with sensitivity and modesty, whether dealing with people who might help DEBRA, EB families or the DEBRA staff are qualities that I and many other people look up to. It was a privilege for me as Chairman of DEBRA to observe and work closely with John over those 14 years and we were all so delighted when he received the OBE in recognition of his contribution to DEBRA and towards finding a cure for EB.

Thank you John and God bless you.

### **Carole Wanless**

In 1995 John had been Corporate Appeals Director at DebRA for a couple of years and was looking to organise the charity's first Annual Dinner in the following summer. He'd already secured the Ballroom at The Dorchester as the venue, and Baroness Thatcher had succumbed to his undoubted charm and agreed to be Guest Speaker.

What he needed next was a professional fundraiser with experience of organising events to help put it together, and that was the start of our 10-year working relationship.

And what an unforgettable working relationship it was. There were a number of 'highs', and the occasional 'low' during that time. Watching Baroness Thatcher at the inaugural DebRA Dinner deliver a stirring 20 minute speech, without notes, about EB and its possible treatments – and, I should probably add, without any mention of politics. You could have heard a pin drop in the Ballroom - and that's quite a feat for any politician!

Also memorable, though not in such a good way, was the 1997 Dinner and Race Night. John had written to Martell Cognac, who at the time were the sponsors of the Grand National horse race, to ask if they would loan the charity some racing memorabilia to help theme the event. They very kindly sent four antique jockey caps which we used to decorate the auction item display just outside the Ballroom. It was only when clearing up at the end of the evening that The Dorchester staff informed us that these four irreplaceable caps had disappeared. I felt sick to my stomach, but John pondered for a brief moment and then suggested I write to the table hosts asking for their help in locating the missing items. This I duly did and by the end of the following week they were returned in an unmarked brown envelope.

John was a natural fundraiser, not just because of inimitable way with people, but because he was full of new ideas as to how to raise money.

By 1998, the annual DebRA dinner had really taken off and we were on a roll. John was determined that that the Live Auction that year should be bigger and better than the previous two. He set his sights on securing what he called the “Prime Minister’s Selection” as the top auction lot. His idea was to approach the four living Prime Ministers – Baroness Thatcher, John Major, Lord Callaghan and Sir Edward Heath and ask them to select their favourite champagne and favourite whisky. John would purchase the chosen bottles and personally deliver them to the relevant Prime Ministers for signature, taking them away once signed.

I think it’s fair to say that everyone involved with the Dinner – staff and Appeal Council members alike - thought that whilst this was an amazing auction item in theory (it certainly hadn’t been done before although it has certainly been replicated since) - everything hinged on ALL the living Prime Ministers agreeing to be involved, and that this was highly unlikely to be achieved. However, I think we all underestimated John’s unparalleled powers of persuasion and gentle persistence. He collected the last signed bottles literally two days before the event.

It was a privilege to work with John on the annual DebRA Dinners and I loved every minute of it. I like to think that John learned a few things from me about fundraising over the years but I'm pretty sure that professionally I benefitted far more from our relationship. Certainly I'm not just a better fundraiser but also a better person for having known him.

Thank you John. You will be very much missed.

### **Richard Vardy**

How does one begin to talk about a man in just a few minutes, who led such a full life? In his autobiography, that I recently re read, he considers that he was a lucky man. I always feel we make our own luck in this life and John worked very hard on his luck.

His book reaffirmed much of my knowledge of the man. He was a very good businessman, and in his own words, a workaholic. He also had great charm and used it to full effect.

I remember my first meeting very well. Unfortunately, I was rather late into the world of the charity DebRA. I was working as Company Secretary at Investec Bank, when my very good friend Ross Jones invited me to a DebRA golf day. From the start I realized the day would be very special. The golf was most enjoyable but nothing had prepared me for hearing about and witnessing EB at first hand. One of the children with the condition was present and I was immediately converted to the cause. So much so I paid again for my golf ticket. That was just the start. John worked his magic on me and before I could drive away that day I had been recruited as a supporter.

For some reason John chose to go into the world of catering and like his prowess at squash he rose to the highest possible levels. And I mean high.

In his early days of training in the catering profession he worked with a certain Derek Vardy at Gardner Merchant. They both got on famously, as I would have expected them to, knowing both characters. Derek Vardy was my Uncle. It is a very small world. !

In his working life John was never afraid to take on a challenge and make the hard decisions. He had the clarity of foresight to see what needed doing and worked to achieve those ends. These are the same skills he brought to his time working at DebRA.

Golf was one of the first sporting activities on the list at DebRA and John grew a magnificent list of golf days at some of the most prestigious courses in the UK. I myself attended the wonderful Ryder cup competition at Portmarnock, held over four days. I am not sure we were allowed to call it the Ryder Cup.

It is opportune that I should mention here that it is proposed to hold a memorial golf competition in honour of John. All friends of John and DebRA golf supporters are most welcome. A trophy is most kindly being donated by Ian Mair, who was such a keen supporter of Debra golf in its foundation years.

It was very fitting that this great man should have recognition at the highest level, and his family and all his supporters were delighted when John was awarded an OBE. A fitting result for so many years of service.

John also received the Order of Lazarus (OLJ) following an introduction from myself. Lazarus is an ancient order and often recognises those who have achieved greatness in the Charity world.

There are so many supporters that John signed up. Please forgive me if I do not list them all. You know who you are. The DebRA Appeals Council grew to a very large number, and many high ranking City names were included.

From my earliest days at DebRA I arranged for Investec Bank to host the Appeal council meetings. I think John appreciated having such a central and regular home for the Appeals Counsel.

A special mention must be made of the Governor of the Bank of England



Eddie George. (Perhaps one of the most affable and able of Governors) John contacted him to discuss a project called Heart of the City. This was an initiative to raise the charitable profile of the city and increase further fundraising. Yet another example of John's fertile mind when it came to charitable ideas.

One final example of John's unflinching support. A friend of mine in the Hindhead area formed a trust to try and raise the funds necessary to save Undershaw, the old home of Conan Doyle. I introduced John who immediately gave us the benefit of his skills. Unfortunately, John was showing early signs of his illness but it did not deter him and he attended all our meetings. The story has a happy ending because a local school for Children with learning difficulties bought the house, with a most generous donation from a parent. The important parts of the house have been preserved.

In recent years John succumbed to the dreadful condition that is Vascular Dementia. I visited John a few times and was very saddened to see his condition, and how fast his health deteriorated. I cannot speak too highly of the care John received at Broome Park Nursing Home.

John was a very special person and was an influence and support to all who knew him.

I can do no better than quote the last words of John's Autobiography.

"Life is a gift-we should enjoy it to the full. As far as we know it is the only life we shall ever be given! But that like so many things, is another story"

I think John lived his life as a gift, and I have no doubt he gave it 100 per cent.

His work for DebRA was given wholeheartedly, and he will always have a special place in our memories. If he was a lucky man, we are all doubly lucky to have known him.

### **For my father, by James**

Dad, big JBT, The man who always had a smile on his face, despite never being able to beat me at golf... I still can't really believe you're gone, but what a life you had.

I had many happy memories of our family trips out to Myrtle Beach in Carolina, where me, Mum and Dad whittled away the days playing golf and sampling huge US food, two pastimes he had a passion for!

Dad loved sport and was a very accomplished squash player, from an early age he loved to get me out on the squash court. Even when he was 67, he'd have me sprinting around the court while not even breaking a sweat himself. It was a real passion of his and I'm glad that he instilled on me from a young age the joy of sport. It was only in recent years I discovered Dad's father was a very keen cyclist, something I've clearly inherited, when Dad watched me start the London to Paris in 2014 you could see there was real pride in his eyes.

As we all know, Dad loved the world of work, from a young age he pushed me to do work experience with some amazing firms, he had a real knack of getting what he wanted from influential people, for that I'm truly grateful, it's made me the success I am today. He always told me the most important thing was to enjoy what you do for work, as a youngster you see work as a dull necessity but because of Dad's stewardship I have a job that I love with great colleagues and for that I know he'd be proud.

If I can carry myself to be half as successful as he was I'll be a happy man.

Dad, there are moments in recent months that I wish I could have shared with you - boxing at the O2 in front of 750 people, being the Best Man at my best mate's wedding and completing on my first house in Fulham the day before you passed away.

I know you'd be proud of how I've carried myself through life and will always look up to you and your passion for life and helping others. Your love of sport has evidently rubbed off on me - boxing, squash, golf... but I'm sorry Dad, for me it's rugby over football...

I'll miss you now that you're gone but will cherish the time we had together and the impact you've had on not just me, but so many others lives.

I love you Dad.

## **For John, by Helen**

John and I would have been married for nearly 33 years when John passed away peacefully at Broome Park Nursing Home in Betchworth.

John and I met in the First Class cabin of a British Airways 747 at Johannesburg Airport and before he came on board I had been drilled by Bob Ferguson, the catering officer about the VIP about to board the flight and he told me that everything had to be perfect! Sadly that was not to be as we had a three-hour delay when everything that could go wrong went wrong! Anyway being the experienced Fleet Director that I was I somehow I managed to wing it and blag my way through – burnt canapes, overcooked roast beef and melting ice cream!

John got off in Nairobi as did I – and lo and behold John got back on to our flight to London the next evening! This time the flight was on time and after the meal was served (perfect this time of course!) it gave us a chance to chat about mutual interests – musical theatre – golf – travel – Westminster Catering College and so on. So when we were getting close to London he came up with the chat up line of all times and I fell for it! That line was, ‘I have been invited to The Waterside Restaurant at Bray next week and wondered if you would like to come with me?’ The rest as they say is history!

Many of our friends who were at our wedding are here today and I am so happy that the good times have been remembered with such clarity and humour. I am sure you will have gathered by now that John was a complete workaholic and I had to accept that quite early in our marriage! An example was when I was in labour with James - John took me to the hospital – wearing his dinner suit as he was going to an event with Lord King – the then Chairman of British Airways. As soon as James arrived off John went!

However what a difference the birth of James made to our lives – we were so fortunate to have a healthy child – there were lots of raised eyebrows at the time from both our families about having a child so late in life! However James was the reason we both became involved with DebRA. I should also say how thrilled John would be that James continues to support DebRA by way of taking part in golf days, clearing out his wardrobe, cycle

races and runs and spreading the word, as I try to do as well. Not the cycling and running though!

Our work helping DebRA soon became a 24/7 affair for both of us and I am going to take this opportunity to apologise now to those of you who never got a conversation from us about anything else! The only break was when we had lovely holidays with my family in Western Australia, golfing holidays in North Carolina and breaks in South Africa and Majorca with David and Janet. I hold so many precious memories of those times with John.

When it became apparent that John was poorly and that he needed specialist care I was so fortunate to find Broome Park Nursing Home. The care and love that John received was exceptional and the love and support that I received from the other relatives (The Friends of Broome Park) has kept me going through the worst times. The Friends make sure that those patients who have no visitors or relatives get looked after with presents on birthdays and Christmas as well as extra treats for all during the year. They support relatives as well who need lots of hugs along the way as I did. Many of those who looked after John are here today and I want to give you all a very public thank you for your loving care.

John and I took our vows at our marriage for better or for worse and the last years sadly were the worst ones. It has been quite dreadful to see this once enormous man decline with the ravages of vascular dementia. I have struggled to understand and said 'why' so many times. He really didn't deserve it but then nobody deserves what life throws at them do they— we can only try and do the best with what time we get given.

However as you have heard John certainly did that and he thrived on his work – whether for Gardner Merchant, British Airways or DebRA.

He adored his children and grandchildren and I do hope that today will bring back many happy memories to all of you who knew him as they have to me, tell you a lot more about him (how often do we get to know the person a little more at funerals\_?) and inspire you to make the most of your time in this beautiful world. Please feel free to come and walk around Clandon Wood any time during the year — and remember the times that John touched your lives.

Together we will now say farewell to this amazing man, devoted husband, father, brother, friend, colleague, relative and afterwards I hope you will join me in raising a glass to all the good times – of which there were truly many.